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ABSTRACT

A review of studies on early field experiences centers on John Dewey's belief that pre-practice teaching laboratory experiences should foster reflective criticism of educational purposes and instructional methods and result in more effective student teaching experiences. Current studies have indicated that early field experiences, by focusing on how to complete classroom tasks and by excluding consideration of why tasks are important, encourage imitation rather than reflective thinking and experimentation. An effective early field experience program should promote teaching candidates' analytical skills and their teaching concepts and skills. Program designers should consider establishing a content structure, in teaching methods courses, which will serve as a foci for observation activities. Preservice students would be expected to integrate field observation information with formal descriptions and definitions in subsequent coursework, addressing the components of clinical pedagogical knowledge, e.g., diagnosis, communication, planning, managing, and evaluation. (JD)

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Do Early Field Experiences in Teacher Education Provide a Meaningful Context For Acquiring Pedagogical Knowledge

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Nolan (1982) provides an insightful analysis of teacher socialization roles and functions of field experiences from Dewey (1904) to Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981). In this essay, Nolan contends teacher educators have lost sight of Dewey's notion that early field experiences serve to liberalize the professional socialization of teachers. Dewey distinguished pre-practice teaching laboratory experiences and apprenticeships/internships in terms of the purposes each served. He saw the apprenticeship/internship as the culminating experience which provided teaching candidates opportunities to practice their pedagogical skills and techniques. Conversely, he believed that pre-practice teaching laboratory experiences, which we now call early field experiences, should foster reflective criticism of educational purposes and instructional methods. This reflective spirit would, in turn, result in a more thoughtful student of teaching. Further, Dewey warned that premature placement of teaching candidates in classroom experiences before they had become reflective students of pedagogy would result in candidates adopting the methods and recommendations of their supervising teacher with little thought (reflection) to principles of learning, development, and sociology. In other words, Dewey stressed that ill-timed placement of teaching candidates in field experiences would stifle their potential for reflective inquiry while encouraging mindless imitation.

The present condition of teacher education indicates that Dewey's concerns regarding early field experiences were justified. That is, university supervisors often play a legitimizing role with regard to school policies and

procedures through their encouragement to candidates to accept and abide by current policy. By focusing on how to complete classroom tasks, to the exclusion of considering why the tasks are important, teacher educators are encouraging imitation rather than reflective thinking and experimentation (Zeicher, 1980).

Examining the limited research addressing pre-student teaching field experience from Dewey's perspective gives credence to an observation made by Zeichner (1980) that field based experiences contribute to the development of utilitarian teaching perspectives which divorce teaching from its ethical and political dimension. For example, Ingle and Robinson (1965) reported no difference in achievement between students observing in a classroom and control students who did not participate in an observation experience. Later, Ingle and Zaret (1968) sought to determine whether the degree of involvement in a field experience influenced course achievement. They reported students fulfilling tutorial roles in a classroom field experience performed at the same level on a final examination in an educational psychology course as the counterparts who had served only as observers in classrooms. Continuing with this line of inquiry, Hedberg (1979) sought to determine whether a field experience which included tutoring, directing small groups on instructional tasks, and developing learning stations would affect attainment in educational psychology coursework. Similar to earlier efforts, he found no difference in performance on a final course examination among field experience and control students who attended class but did not participate in a field experience. These investigations appear to have been based on the assumption that field experiences with increasing levels of instructional involvement would influence achievement in coursework related to teaching. Collectively, their findings did not reveal an expected relationship between participating in field experience and achievement in educational psychology coursework. Perhaps the field experiences were

designed to encourage the assimilation of existing classroom practices rather than a critical analysis of classroom practices which were discrepant with theory and practice espoused in the coursework.

Students who have completed field experiences prior to student teaching often are quite positive about the value of these experiences (Benton and Osborn, 1979). To illustrate this generalization, Scherer (1979) and Sunal (1980) sought to determine the affective influence of early field experiences on subsequent experiences in the preparation of teachers. Scherer (1979) found that student teachers who had completed early field experiences had more positive self-concepts than their counterparts who had not completed an early field experience. Yet Sunal (1980) found no difference among student teacher perceptions of role expectations when the student teachers were grouped by whether they had completed an early field experience. These investigations into the affective influence of early field experiences suggest that teaching candidates perceive early field experiences as beneficial but are ambiguous regarding how the experiences have enhanced their preparation. This phenomenon is also consistent with an assumption by teacher educators that early field experiences should encourage the assimilation of the aspiring teaching candidate into the social mileau of the classroom not as a critical observer, but as an uncritical recorder and emulator of behaviors and practices of the classroom teacher. This position appears to be consistent with the scenario,"schools and universities: partners in the development of traditional teaching practices" by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981).

MEANINGFUL CONTEXT

Recent investigations have been conducted to determine whether an experimental set is operating (Denton, 1982) or can be developed (Ross, Hughes, Hill, 1981) in teacher preparation programs which include early field experiences.

In the inquiry by Denton (1982) an effort was extended to examine the influence of an early field experience on subsequent, not present, coursework. It was hypothesized that the influence of early field experiences is delayed serving to establish a meaningful set for prospective teachers regarding teaching skills addressed in ensuing coursework. Subjects were 139 students (61 experimental subjects, 78 control subjects) enrolled in an undergraduate methods of teaching course. The experimental subjects were secondary education majors who had successfully completed a field experience prior to their enrollment in the methods course, while the control students were certification seeking students who were not required to complete the field experience course.

The field experience placed the teaching candidate in a supervised, participatory experience in a secondary school for a minimum of 30 clock hours. Teaching candidates were expected to assist the teacher with organizational tasks, such as duplicating class materials, monitoring study sessions as well as completing numerous classroom observation checklists. Readings and class time (one hour/week) on-campus complemented the classroom experiences through emphases on topics related to classroom discipline, child development, curriculum, teacher authority and teacher expectancy.

The methods of teaching course, which served as an environmental constant in this inquiry, was developed to acquaint the secondary teaching candidate with the fundamentals of interacting with students, managing classroom activities and organizing for instruction. Instructional skills emphasized in the course included selecting concepts and generalization, phrasing concise performance objectives, identifying and diagnosing the entering needs of students, developing remediation activities, and instructional strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction. These topics formed the basis for 30 performance objectives for the course. Criterion-referenced tests and objective

specific assessments were used to determine candidate competence with respect to the objectives. The total number of objectives accomplished served as the basis for determining the teaching candidates' course grade, as well as the dependent variable in this investigation.

Results of this inquiry were obtained from a t-test for unequal variance conducted on the total number of objectives achieved by students in the two groups. A significant value ($t = 3.34$, $p = .001$) was determined when the means of the field experience group ($\bar{x}_E = 25.67$, S.D. = 3.53) and control group ($\bar{x}_C = 22.95$, S.D. = 5.99) were compared. While additional analyses were conducted, results of these analyses supported the initial finding. The hypothesized "meaningful set" induced by early field experiences on subsequent learning of teaching skills is consistent with these findings. The early field experience in this inquiry appears to have provided teaching candidates an experiential basis for analyzing knowledge and skills of teaching. Thus, greater comprehension of concepts of teaching may have occurred by teaching candidates experiencing early field experiences in contrast to their peers who may have resorted to less meaningful strategies (i.e., memorization) to "learn" the constructs of teaching in the teaching methods course. The early field experience possibly provided a classroom referent for analyzing instructional skills which were subsequently addressed in the methods of teaching course.

In the investigation by Ross, Hughes and Hill (1981) a strategy was examined which encouraged the critical analysis of classroom events from the perspective of underlying concepts and generalizations from educational psychology. It was hypothesized that if students were specifically oriented to identify applications of key concepts while participating in a field experience, meaningful learning of these concepts would occur. Subjects were 68 pre-service teachers (34 experimental, 34 control) enrolled in an educational psychology

course. This course included a field experience for 12 clock hours which all teaching candidates in this inquiry experienced. The experimental treatment directed candidates to focus attention on instructional and learning applications of specific concepts, such as positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, operant conditioning, extinction, criterion-referenced testing and norm referenced testing. Students in the control treatment were encouraged to study the same concepts but as part of the course requirements not directly related to the field experience.

After each field-visit, experimental subjects were directed to write a brief paragraph summarizing the types of classes and events observed. In addition, these candidates were to note whether instances of the specific concepts had been observed and, if so, they were to summarize the concepts' occurrences in a few sentences. Control subjects also were required to write brief reports noting the teaching situation observed, perceived instances of good and poor teaching relative to course readings, and were encouraged to provide suggestions for improving the instruction in the classroom.

The dependent variable of interest was a course post-test on the specific concepts administered on the last day of class. Students were told the test was being used to evaluate their learning in the course, but would not count in the determination of final grades. Analysis of these data by treatment groups revealed a significant effect $F(1,65) = 16.79$ $p < .001$ indicating a superior performance by experimental candidates ($\bar{x}_{adj} = 69.4$) compared with control candidates ($\bar{x}_{adj} = 55.7$) on the post-test.

The results of this study indicate there are advantages to attaining learning and instructional concepts with applications observed in school classrooms. The investigators (Ross, Hughes and Hill, 1981) conclude that the experimental treatment was successful in producing superior concept attainment,

because the structure of this treatment required the teaching candidates to critically analyze the specific concepts in the field setting; further, it required candidates to think about the concepts over an extended period of time.

These investigations suggest that acquisition of learning concepts and instructional concepts and skills can be enhanced by participating in early field experiences. However, these inquiries differ from other investigations on this topic through the function, i.e., experiental set, the early field experience was designed to provide to teaching candidates. By providing a basis for critically thinking about the concepts and skills of teaching, these investigations have provided at least modest support to Dewey's notion that early field experiences should foster reflective criticism of methods and purposes of education.

A PROPOSAL FOR EARLY-FIELD EXPERIENCES

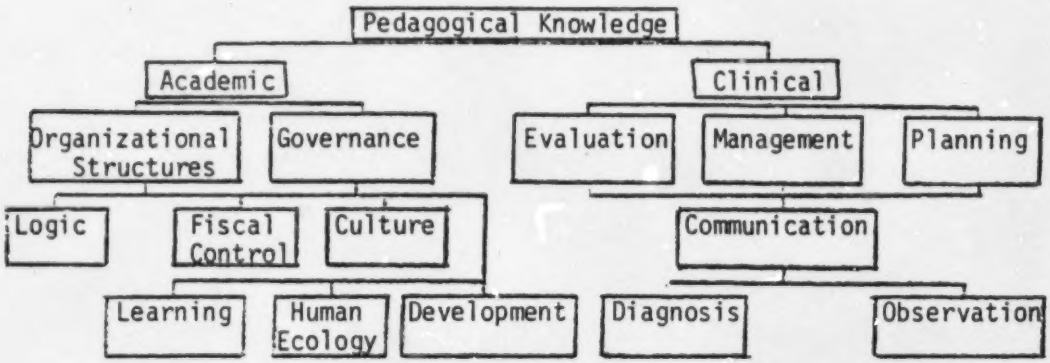
Extending the generalization that early field experiences should promote analytical skills of teaching candidates regarding teaching concepts and skills is the theme of the final segment of this paper. Reviewing recent discussions by Haberman (1982), Medley (1982), and Smith (1980) on teacher education has suggested guidelines for structuring early field experiences which will encourage thoughtful analysis of the content and processes of teaching. To illustrate, Haberman (1982) cautions the designer of field experiences to consider the substantial impact of the political and organizational press of schools on teaching candidates. Generally, teaching candidates engaged in field experiences encounter pressure to adopt and conform rather than to critically analyze existing practices and views of faculty and the school. Anticipating this influence, designers of early field experiences should consider ways to establish a content structure of teaching which serves as the foci for observation activities.

This recommendation is compatible with Medley's proposal (1982), dynamics of teacher evaluation, which recommends five assessment points in a teacher's career. In this proposal, Medley distinguishes the terms teacher competency, teacher competence, teacher performance and teacher effectiveness. Early field experiences structured to provide candidates opportunities to identify and critically analyze concepts of teaching would provide the content referent for numerous teaching competencies. These competencies in turn would be assessed at point two in Medley's proposal for measuring teacher competency.

Returning to the content structure for teaching, Smith (1980) recommends two content domains, which are, clinical pedagogical knowledge and academic pedagogical knowledge. Clinical knowledge in this sense represents practical teaching suggestions (prescriptions) and their influence (effects) on student achievement, attitudes or conduct, e.g., objectives serve to guide instruction, learning and assessment. Academic pedagogical knowledge represents philosophical, social, psychological, economic and psychosocial variables which influence the success of students in school and community life. Academic knowledge in this sense does not produce prescriptions for teaching; however, concepts and principles from this domain are useful for policy level discussions and decisions, e.g., the higher the parents' status, the more likely the child's status will be equal to that of his parents. Concepts and generalizations from both domains should be among the teaching candidates' knowledge of teaching as they assume their initial field assignment. Table 1 presents a possible content taxonomy which could be used to structure early field experiences of teaching candidates regardless of school level (preschool through secondary school) assignment. Assuming teaching candidates were introduced to learning and development concepts in the academic domain prior to their initial field experience, the initial field experience could be devoted primarily to the mastery of

clinical knowledge and skills of observation.

Table 1



Knowledge of observation techniques and skills could then, in turn, be applied to the identification of learning concepts, such as reinforcement, operant conditioning, stimulus-response and development stages whether of the cognitive, moral or social variety. Candidates would then be encouraged to integrate observed information with formal descriptions and definitions in a fashion similar to the treatment of Ross, Hughes and Hill (1981). Extending this process to all components of the academic pedagogical knowledge domain in Table 1 would increase the probability of reflective criticism of educational principles and practices in subsequent coursework addressing the components of clinical pedagogical knowledge, e.g., diagnosis, communication, planning, management and evaluation. This approach to early field experiences would obviously place emphasis on the teaching candidate as a student of teaching rather than as a teaching technician. The distinction between these two roles was aptly described by Dewey (1904).

> "For immediate skill may be got at the cost of power to go on growing. The teacher who leaves the professional school with power in managing a class of children may appear to superior advantage the first day, the first week, the first month, or even the first year, as compared with some other teacher who has a much more vital command of the psychology, logic, and ethics of development. But later 'progress' may with such consist only in perfecting and refining skill already possessed. Such persons seem

> to know how to teach but are not students of teaching. Even though they go on studying books of pedagogy, reading teachers' journals, attending teachers' institutes, etc., yet the root of the matter is not in them, unless they continue to be students of subject matter and students of mind activity. Unless a teacher is such a student, he may continue to improve the mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life. How often do candid instructors in training schools acknowledge disappointment in the later careers of even their more promising candidates. They seem to strike twelve at the start. There is an unexpected and seemingly unaccountable failure to maintain steady growth."(p. 15-16)

In closing, this proposal for early field experiences is based on the goal of preparing a teacher who would act on developing principles and who would continue to grow in contrast to a technician who acts with no underlying rationale. Certainly the early field experience in isolation cannot accomplish this goal, yet when integrated with subsequent coursework and field-experiences, student teaching and internships, with like orientation students of teaching would result.

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